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❖THE❖OLD❖TESTAMENT❖STUDENT.❖

VOL. VIII.

JUNE, 1889.

NO. 10.

WHATEVER may or may not be true of prophecy, one thing is true ; the prophetic element constitutes the largest part of divine revelation recorded in the Old Testament. What have we besides prophecy? The legislative element. Yet much of this, Deuteronomy for example, is placed in a prophetic setting and breathes a prophetic spirit. The Psalms? But are not the best Psalms, those most read and most helpful, prophetic even in the narrowest sense of that term? Even Job furnishes us a prophetic character,—Eliphaz the Temanite, who tells us of his marvelous vision (Job 4:12-17). We must, to be sure, recognize as separate the priestly element with its law and ceremonial, and the wisdom element with its philosophical inquiry into the problems which trouble the observing mind ; for both these elements are as distinct from the prophetic as is either from the other. But how small is each in comparison with the prophetic !

ANOTHER thing is true of prophecy ; that of all portions of Scripture it comes into closest connection with the life and heart of our humanity. What do we care for the abrogated Levitical system? It is interesting from the archæological point of view ; it is important as showing God's method of dealing with the infant church ; but where does it touch us to day? How many of us in time of affliction go to the Book of Job for comfort, or in time of despondency and doubt seek help from the experience of Koheleth? Yet the whole world can produce no such book as that of Job, and in all literature there is no truer, more pathetic record of a storm-tossed soul than that contained in the Book of Ecclesiastes.

The stories of Scripture, it will be said, have moved and influenced men of every age and condition of life. These stories find an entrance to the heart, and appeal to it at a time when the mind is capable of receiving nothing else. They remain in it and cling to it long after all else is forgotten. Have not the Scripture stories come closer to man, done more for man, than any other literature, sacred or profane? This may be so; but the fact is, the Scripture stories are, in the truest and strictest sense of the term, prophecy. Of the prophetic portions of our Scripture, therefore, it may be said, They are bound up more intimately than any other with our lives; they strike us at more points; they make revelation seem more real, more precious.

A THIRD thing is true of the prophetic portions of Scripture; that of all portions they most clearly show us God. In the types and shadows of the Levitical system we see God. He appears also in the Wisdom literature. But do not our best ideas, our clearest conceptions of him come, so far as the Old Testament is concerned, from the study of the consecrated lives of his prophets, from the great moral truths they taught, from the principles seen to underlie their work, from the distinct and definite revelations of his attributes they make?

Imagine for a moment the Old Testament with the prophetic element omitted. What a void in our understanding of God's character and providential dealings, even with the New Testament in our hands. If we would know and understand God and his methods, his love and his holiness, his attitude toward the righteous and the wicked, his treatment of individuals and of nations, let us take great care not to omit the prophetic element; for here as nowhere else, we feel and see the divine.

SOME views of biblical history, especially those which are urged by Wellhausen and his school, are, theoretically, very attractive and plausible. Presented, it must be allowed, with literary skill, and supported by what seems to be a series of undoubted facts, these theories have gained many supporters. But as is often the case in such matters the claim is reasonably made that they have failed to account for *all* the facts and hence need only to be thoroughly applied to any period of biblical history to be found wanting. It would seem that what is required, therefore, is a full and strong presentation of the hypothesis as it seeks to account for every phase in the life of the people of Israel. Then it may easily be proved to be unscientific. It would be convicted of failure to account satisfactorily for the historical

and undoubted elements of the situation under review. A recent article in this journal presented a hypothesis similar to these views of the Wellhausen school, in its application to the time and work of the prophet Amos. It has called forth, among other criticisms, the following letter :

At the suggestion of one deeply interested in your journal and what it discusses, I venture a brief criticism upon Mr. Atkinson's "Amos," in the April number. Able as is the paper, it is misleading in not clearly stating the historic condition of those times. Amos was a reformer rather than a teacher of a system of ethics and of theology. The ten tribes were apostate from Yahweh's covenant. Their priests and prophets may have reeled with drink, but they were not priests of Yahweh. From the disruption under Jeroboam, northern Israel was without a true sanctuary, without a true priest, without atoning sacrifices, and apparently without celebration of the Passover. What, therefore, Yahweh's prophets said to Ephraim must be viewed from this historic status.

Wellhausen errs in representing that Ahab did not intend to abandon Jehovah's worship when he set up an altar to Baal in Samaria. He had been brought up in apostasy and followed the sin of the calf-worship of Bethel and of Dan; so a shrine to Baal for Jezebel was but another step in the old-time backsliding. It is evident from the records that prophets to the northern kingdom, from the man of God out of Judah to Micaiah, Elijah and Amos, were resolutely concerned in efforts to recover those apostate tribes, and their utterances are to be explained by that endeavor. This is shown in 1 Kgs. 12:25-14:20; while ch. 17 shows Elijah as repairing the ruined altar of Yahweh, and taking twelve symbolical stones with which to build another. It illustrates how far from divine covenant-worship the ten tribes had really gone. Even those who secretly remained loyal to Yahweh were unknown to Elijah. Obadiah was a notable exception (ch. 18), and had concealed the true prophets. Hence the historical impropriety of seeking for a development in theology, or for systematic ethical teaching, in prophets to northern Israel, from Jeroboam I. to Sargon II., who carried her captive. They voiced the messages needed for the time, some of which, like Elijah's letter to Jehoram, were of national importance because of the royal influence, 2 Chron. 21:12-20. Apostate Israel never returned to Yahweh's worship, and never as a people returned from captivity.

That "Amos does not lay much stress on the institutional character of the covenant" (p. 289) seems to be answered by saying, so Kalisch renders the word, "You only have I *covenanted* with," viz., the seed of Abraham. Little value indeed attached to the worship of Baal and the calf-shrines of Bethel. Yahweh demanded loyal service from all the people with whom He had covenanted. Hence the exhortations and denunciations of His prophets.

Only in the southern kingdom of Judah, if anywhere, was any development in ethic, in ritual, in theology, of value thereafter. And it needed the strong hand of Nebuchadnezzar to root out the tendency to idolatry in that people. No prophet of the eighth century B. C. had a system to teach, but a message to deliver which should reform the erring. If I am wrong, I desire to be corrected; but I cannot now read the history of that era otherwise than as above stated. The old church was as much disrupted by Jeroboam and his successors as the disrupted kingdom which they governed.

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